

Deaths of Three Drivers in Six Months Spurs Change In TM, and a Search For Answers From Field

Turret traversing has killed three armor soldiers in the last six months, raising serious safety issues concerning crew communication, coordination, and discipline. In each accident, the tank driver's head was above the hatch when the tank commander (TC) traversed the turret. Additionally, "power" was called and the TC's intention to rotate the turret was announced. The tragedy in all three accidents is the fact that each could have been prevented.

The TC told his driver to "stay in the hole" and the driver replied "ok." The driver, however, was not properly seated, even though his seat was in its lowest position. He was killed when the TC rotated the turret and the turret struck the driver's head.

Lapses in communication directly relate to close calls as well as serious accidents in all combat vehicles. TM 9-2350-264-10-1 specifically directs that CVC helmets will be used any time a tank is moved. This standard is designed to optimize crew coordination. No crewmember should ever remove his means of communication — it is literally his lifeline.

The tank driver and loader were tasked to transfer ammunition with another tank. To do this, both soldiers knew they had to rotate their turret and move the vehicle 25 meters. The driver's seat was in the full-up position and neither soldier was wearing a CVC helmet. The loader traversed the turret, which struck the driver's head, killing him.

The Abrams tank has a very good safety record; however, in those instances when a crewman

gets in the path of its moving armor or equipment, serious accidents result. Therefore, to better protect Abrams tank drivers from turret rotation hazards, the following change to the TM has been made: **When an individual is in the driver's compartment, turret power is "on," and the turret or gun is unlocked, then the driver's hatch MUST be CLOSED.**

As always, TCs must announce "power" before traversing the turret and they should double-check, if necessary, to ensure everyone (inside and outside the tank) is aware of intended turret movements and clear from danger.

Risk management can help crews and leaders prevent turret-related accidents. Leaders must stress crew coordination drills, emphasizing the standards printed in the TM. Soldiers should drill until performance and familiarity with equipment is automatic. The turret is a known hazard to tank crewmen, but the controls for managing the turret hazards are also well known: train to standard, enforce the standard, and perform to standard all the time.

Program Manager, Abrams Tanks is looking for recommendations from the field for an engineering change to help prevent drivers from being injured or killed in turret traversing accidents. Send your suggestions to:

TRADOC System Manager,
Abrams Tank
ATTN: ATZK-TS
Fort Knox, KY 40121-5000

You may also call the new 24-hour-a-day Abrams Field Program Hotline number: 1-800-989-TANK (1-800-989-8265).